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Bangladesh receives roughly \$60 million in U.S. aid every year. One would think that the Bush administration should expect something in return, such as a commitment to hold off the forces of radical Islam which currently threaten Bangladesh's stability. But if the case of a moderate Muslim on trial for sedition is any evidence, Bangladesh is swiftly slipping into Islamists' hands.

In happier times, Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury operated an independent, English-language newspaper out of Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka. Angered by the rise of Islamists, Mr. Choudhury took the bold step of using his publication to oppose his country's radicalization. That caught the attention of the Hebrew Writers' Association, who in 2003 invited Mr. Choudhury to Israel to speak at a conference on establishing peaceful Jewish-Muslim relations. Mr. Choudhury accepted the invitation, but was detained at the airport by Bangladeshi authorities.

That's where Mr. Choudhury's life took a tragic turn. After being blindfolded and beaten, he was held in solitary confinement for 17 months, as the government tried to build a case that Mr. Choudhury was an Israeli spy. The charge was preposterous, but in Islamists' eyes, anyone who advocates peaceful relations with the Zionist entity must be a traitor. With the help of U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk and human-rights activist Richard Benkin, Mr. Choudhury was eventually released from prison. The sedition charges, however, remained pending.

Mr. Choudhury's ordeal didn't end there. In July, his newspaper offices were bombed by Islamist radicals; in September, a judge with ties to Bangladesh's Radical Party ordered his sedition trial to resume; then, earlier this month, a mob of 40 militants beat Mr. Choudhury in his offices. It is believed that Bangladeshi officials were among the mob. No one expects Mr. Choudhury to get a fair trial.

Throughout all of this, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has been noticeably absent. Her effort to balance the growing radicalization of her government with the impression that Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim country is failing badly. Both Mr. Choudhury's supporters and enemies see this trial as a crucial moment in Bangladesh's history: Either Bangladesh will live up to its image as a moderate and tolerant country or the Islamists will gain even more control.

We also see it as a crucial moment for the war on terror. The United States must encourage people like Mr. Choudhury to speak out. But when they do, it must also do all it can to protect them. Freeing Mr. Choudhury will tell others like him that when you stand against Islamists, the United States will stand with you.